THE TINKER'S WEDDING AND OTHER PLAYS

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THE TINKER'S WEDDING
RIDERS TO THE SEA AND
THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN
BY JOHN M. SYNGE

LONDON
GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD.
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THE TINKER'S WEDDING

PREFACE

THE drama is made serious—in the French sense of the word—not by the degree in which it is taken up with problems that are serious in themselves, but by the degree in which it gives the nourishment, not very easy to define, on which our imaginations live. We should not go to the theatre as we go to a chemist's, or a dram-shop, but as we go to a dinner where the food we need is taken with pleasure and excitement. This was nearly always so in Spain and England and France when the drama was at its richest—the infancy and decay of the drama tend to be didactic—but in these days the play-house is too often stocked with the drugs of many seedy problems, or with the absinthe or vermouth of the last musical comedy.

The drama, like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything. Analysts with their problems, and teachers with their systems, are soon as old-fashioned as the pharmacopœia of Galen—look at Ibsen and the Germans—but

the best plays of Ben Jonson and Molière can no more go out of fashion than the blackberries on the hedges.

Of the things which nourish the imagination humour is one of the most needful, and it is dangerous to limit or destroy it. Baudelaire calls laughter the greatest sign of the Satanic element in man; and where a country loses its humour, as some towns in Ireland are doing, there will be morbidity of mind, as Baudelaire's mind was morbid.

In the greater part of Ireland, however, the whole people, from the tinkers to the clergy, have still a life, and view of life, that are rich and genial and humorous. I do not think that these country people, who have so much humour themselves, will mind being laughed at without malice, as the people in every country have been laughed at in their own comedies.

J. M. S.

December 2nd, 1907.

NOTE.—'The Tinker's Wedding' was first written a few years ago, about the time I was working at 'Riders to the Sea' and 'The Shadow of the Glen.' I have rewritten it since.

J. M. S.

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

MICHAEL BYRNE, *a tinker*

MARY BYRNE, *an old woman, his mother*

SARAH CASEY, *a young tinker woman*

A PRIEST

SCENE—A village road-side after nightfall.

THE TINKER'S WEDDING

ACT I

A village roadside after nightfall. A fire of sticks is burning near the ditch a little to the right. Michael is working beside it. In the background, on the left, a sort of tent and ragged clothes drying on the hedge. On the right a chapel-gate.

SARAH CASEY, *coming in on right, eagerly.*

We'll see his reverence this place, Michael Byrne, and he passing backward to his house to-night.

MICHAEL, *grimly.*

That'll be a sacred and a sainted joy!

SARAH, *sharply.*

It'll be small joy for yourself if you aren't ready with my wedding ring. (*She goes over to him.*) Is it near done this time, or what way is it at all?

MICHAEL.

A poor way only, Sarah Casey, for it's the divil's job making a ring, and you'll be having my hands destroyed in a short while the way I'll not be able to make a tin can at all maybe at the dawn of day.

SARAH, *sitting down beside him and throwing sticks on the fire.*

If it's the divil's job, let you mind it, and leave your speeches that would choke a fool.

MICHAEL, *slowly and glumly.*

And it's you'll go talking of fools, Sarah Casey, when no man did ever hear a lying story even of your like unto this mortal day. You to be going beside me a great while, and rearing a lot of them, and then to be setting off with your talk of getting married, and your driving me to it, and I not asking it at all.

Sarah turns her back to him and arranges something in the ditch.

MICHAEL, *angrily.*

Can't you speak a word when I'm asking what is it ails you since the moon did change?

SARAH, *musingly.*

I'm thinking there isn't anything ails me, Michael Byrne; but the spring-time is a queer time, and it's queer thoughts maybe I do think at whiles.

MICHAEL.

It's hard set you'd be to think queerer than welcome, Sarah Casey; but what will you gain dragging me to the priest this night, I'm saying, when it's new thoughts you'll be thinking at the dawn of day?

SARAH, *teasingly.*

It's at the dawn of day I do be thinking I'd have a right to be going off to the rich tinkers do be travelling from Tibradden to the Tara Hill; for it'd be a fine life to be driving with young Jaunting Jim, where there wouldn't be any big hills to break the back of you, with walking up and walking down.

MICHAEL, *with dismay.*

It's the like of that you do be thinking!

SARAH.

The like of that, Michael Byrne, when there is

a bit of sun in it, and a kind air, and a great smell coming from the thorn trees is above your head.

MICHAEL, *looks at her for a moment with horror, and then hands her the ring.*

Will that fit you now?

SARAH, *trying it on.*

It's making it tight you are, and the edges sharp on the tin.

MICHAEL, *looking at it carefully.*

It's the fat of your own finger, Sarah Casey; and isn't it a mad thing I'm saying again that you'd be asking marriage of me, or making a talk of going away from me, and you thriving and getting your good health by the grace of the Almighty God?

SARAH, *giving it back to him.*

Fix it now, and it'll do, if you're wary you don't squeeze it again.

MICHAEL, *moodily, working again.*

It's easy saying be wary; there's many things easy said, Sarah Casey, you'd wonder a fool even

would be saying at all. (*He starts violently.*) The divil mend you, I'm scalded again!

SARAH, *scornfully.*

If you are, it's a clumsy man you are this night, Michael Byrne (*raising her voice*); and let you make haste now, or herself will be coming with the porter.

MICHAEL, *defiantly, raising his voice.*

Let me make haste? I'll be making haste maybe to hit you a great clout; for I'm thinking it's the like of that you want. I'm thinking on the day I got you above at Rathvanna, and the way you began crying out and we coming down off the hill, crying out and saying "I'll go back to my ma"; and I'm thinking on the way I came behind you that time, and hit you a great clout in the lug, and how quiet and easy it was you came along with me from that hour to this present day.

SARAH, *standing up and throwing all her sticks into the fire.*

And a big fool I was, too, maybe; but we'll be seeing Jaunting Jim to-morrow in Ballinaclash, and he after getting a great price for his white foal in the horse-fair of Wicklow, the way it'll

be a great sight to see him squandering his share of gold, and he with a grand eye for a fine horse, and a grand eye for a woman.

MICHAEL, *working again with impatience.*

The divil do him good with the two of them.

SARAH, *kicking up the ashes with her foot.*

Ah, he's a great lad, I'm telling you, and it's proud and happy I'll be to see him, and he the first one called me the Beauty of Ballinacree, a fine name for a woman.

MICHAEL, *with contempt.*

It's the like of that name they do be putting on the horses they have below racing in Arklow. It's easy pleased you are, Sarah Casey, easy pleased with a big word, or the liar speaks it.

SARAH.

Liar!

MICHAEL.

Liar, surely.

SARAH, *indignantly.*

Liar, is it? Didn't you ever hear tell of the peelers followed me ten miles along the Glen

Malure, and they talking love to me in the dark night; or of the children you'll meet coming from school and they saying one to the other: "It's this day we seen Sarah Casey, the Beauty of Ballinacree, a great sight, surely."

MICHAEL.

God help the lot of them.

SARAH.

It's yourself you'll be calling God to help, in two weeks or three, when you'll be waking up in the dark night and thinking you see me coming with the sun on me, and I driving a high cart with Jaunting Jim going behind. It's lonesome and cold you'll be feeling the ditch where you'll be lying down that night, I'm telling you, and you hearing the old woman making a great noise in her sleep, and the bats squeaking in the trees.

MICHAEL.

Whisht. I hear some one coming the road.

SARAH, *looking out right.*

It's some one coming forward from the doctor's door.

MICHAEL.

It's often his reverence does be in there playing cards, or drinking a sup, or singing songs, until the dawn of day.

SARAH.

It's a big boast of a man with a long step on him and a trumpeting voice. It's his reverence, surely; and if you have the ring done, it's a great bargain we'll make now and he after drinking his glass.

MICHAEL, *going to her and giving her the ring.*

There's your ring, Sarah Casey; but I'm thinking he'll walk by and not stop to speak with the like of us at all.

SARAH, *tidying herself, in great excitement.*

Let you be sitting here and keeping a great blaze, the way he can look on my face; and let you seem to be working, for it's great love the like of him have to talk of work.

MICHAEL, *moodily, sitting down and beginning to work at a tin can.*

Great love, surely.

SARAH, *eagerly.*

Make a great blaze now, Michael Byrne.

The Priest comes in on right; she comes forward in front of him.

SARAH, *in a very plausible voice.*

Good evening, your reverence. It's a grand fine night, by the grace of God.

PRIEST.

The Lord have mercy on us! What kind of a living woman is it that you are at all?

SARAH.

It's Sarah Casey I am, your reverence, the Beauty of Ballinacree, and it's Michael Byrne is below in the ditch.

PRIEST.

A holy pair, surely! Let you get out of my way. (*He tries to pass by.*)

SARAH, *keeping in front of him.*

We are wanting a little word with your reverence.

PRIEST.

I haven't a halfpenny at all. Leave the road, I'm saying.

SARAH.

It isn't a halfpenny we're asking, holy father; but we were thinking maybe we'd have a right to be getting married; and we were thinking it's yourself would marry us for not a halfpenny at all; for you're a kind man, your reverence, a kind man with the poor.

PRIEST, *with astonishment.*

Is it marry you for nothing at all?

SARAH.

It is, your reverence; and we were thinking maybe you'd give us a little small bit of silver to pay for the ring.

PRIEST, *loudly.*

Let you hold your tongue; let you be quiet, Sarah Casey. I've no silver at all for the like of you; and if you want to be married, let you pay your pound. I'd do it for a pound only, and that's making it a sight cheaper than I'd

make it for one of my own pairs is living here in the place.

SARAH.

Where would the like of us get a pound, your reverence?

PRIEST.

Wouldn't you easy get it with your selling asses, and making cans, and your stealing east and west in Wicklow and Wexford and the County Meath? (*He tries to pass her.*) Let you leave the road, and not be plaguing me more.

SARAH, *pleadingly, taking money from her pocket.*

Wouldn't you have a little mercy on us, your reverence? (*Holding out money.*) Wouldn't you marry us for a half a sovereign, and it a nice shiny one with a view on it of the living king's mamma?

PRIEST.

If it's ten shillings you have, let you get ten more the same way, and I'll marry you then.

SARAH, *whining.*

It's two years we are getting that bit, your

reverence, with our pence, and our halfpence, and an odd threepenny bit; and if you don't marry us now, himself and the old woman, who has a great drouth, will be drinking it to-morrow in the fair (*she puts her apron to her eyes, half sobbing*), and then I won't be married any time, and I'll be saying till I'm an old woman: "It's a cruel and a wicked thing to be bred poor."

PRIEST, *turning up towards the fire.*

Let you not be crying, Sarah Casey. It's a queer woman you are to be crying at the like of that, and you your whole life walking the roads.

SARAH, *sobbing.*

It's two years we are getting the gold, your reverence, and now you won't marry us for that bit, and we hard-working poor people do be making cans in the dark night, and blinding our eyes with the black smoke from the bits of twigs we do be burning.

An old woman is heard singing tipsily on the left.

PRIEST, *looking at the can Michael is making.*

When will you have that can done, Michael Byrne?

MICHAEL.

In a short space only, your reverence, for I'm putting the last dab of solder on the rim.

PRIEST.

Let you get a crown along with the ten shillings and the gallon can, Sarah Casey, and I will wed you so.

MARY, *suddenly shouting behind, tipsily.*

Larry was a fine lad, I'm saying; Larry was a fine lad, Sarah Casey——

MICHAEL.

Whisht, now, the two of you. There's my mother coming, and she'd have us destroyed if she heard the like of that talk the time she's been drinking her fill.

MARY, *comes in singing.*

And when he asked him what way he'd die,
And he hanging unrepented,
'Begob,' says Larry, 'that's all in my eye,
By the clergy first invented.'

SARAH.

Give me the jug now, or you'll have it spilt in the ditch.

MARY, *holding the jug with both her hands, in a stilted voice.*

Let you leave me easy, Sarah Casey. I won't spill it, I'm saying. God help you; are you thinking it's frothing full to the brim it is at this hour of the night, and I after carrying it in my two hands a long step from Jemmy Neill's?

MICHAEL, *anxiously.*

Is there a sup left at all.

SARAH, *looking into the jug.*

A little small sup only, I'm thinking.

MARY, *sees the priest, and holds out jug towards him.*

God save your reverence. I'm after bringing down a smart drop; and let you drink it up now, for it's a middling drouthy man you are at all times, God forgive you, and this night is cruel dry.

She tries to go towards him. Sarah holds her back.

PRIEST, *waving her away.*

Let you not be falling to the flames. Keep off, I'm saying.

MARY, *persuasively.*

Let you not be shy of us, your reverence. Aren't we all sinners, God help us! Drink a sup now, I'm telling you; and we won't let on a word about it till the Judgment Day.

She takes up a tin mug, pours some porter into it, and gives it to him.

MARY, *singing, and holding the jug in her hand.*

A lonesome ditch in Ballygan
The day you're beating a tenpenny can;
A lonesome bank in Ballyduff
The time . . .

She breaks off.

It's a bad, wicked song, Sarah Casey; and let you put me down now in the ditch, and I won't sing it till himself will be gone; for it's bad enough he is, I'm thinking, without ourselves making him worse.

SARAH, *putting her down, to the priest, half laughing.*

Don't mind her at all, your reverence. She's no shame the time she's a drop taken; and if it was the Holy Father from Rome was in it, she'd give him a little sup out of her mug, and say the same as she'd say to yourself.

MARY, *to the priest.*

Let you drink it up, holy father. Let you drink it up, I'm saying, and not be letting on you wouldn't do the like of it, and you with a stack of pint bottles above reaching the sky.

PRIEST, *with resignation.*

Well, here's to your good health, and God forgive us all. (*He drinks.*)

MARY.

That's right now, your reverence, and the blessing of God be on you. Isn't it a grand thing to see you sitting down, with no pride in you, and drinking a sup with the like of us, and we the poorest, wretched, starving creatures you'd see any place on the earth?

PRIEST.

If it's starving you are itself, I'm thinking it's well for the like of you that do be drinking when there's drouth on you, and lying down to sleep when your legs are stiff. (*He sighs gloomily.*) What would you do if it was the like of myself you were, saying Mass with your mouth dry, and running east and west for a sick call maybe,

and hearing the rural people again and they saying their sins?

MARY, *with compassion.*

It's destroyed you must be hearing the sins of the rural people on a fine spring.

PRIEST, *with despondency.*

It's a hard life, I'm telling you, a hard life, Mary Byrne; and there's the bishop coming in the morning, and he an old man, would have you destroyed if he seen a thing at all.

MARY, *with great sympathy.*

It'd break my heart to hear you talking and sighing the like of that, your reverence. (*She pats him on the knee.*) Let you rouse up now, if it's a poor, single man you are itself, and I'll be singing you songs unto the dawn of day.

PRIEST, *interrupting her.*

What is it I want with your songs when it'd be better for the like of you, that'll soon die, to be down on your two knees saying prayers to the Almighty God?

MARY.

If it's prayers I want, you'd have a right to say

one yourself, holy father; for we don't have them at all, and I've heard tell a power of times it's that you're for. Say one now, your reverence; for I've heard a power of queer things and I walking the world, but there's one thing I never heard any time, and that's a real priest saying a prayer.

PRIEST.

The Lord protect us!

MARY.

It's no lie, holy father. I often heard the rural people making a queer noise and they going to rest; but who'd mind the like of them? And I'm thinking it should be great game to hear a scholar, the like of you, speaking Latin to the Saints above.

PRIEST, *scandalised.*

Stop your talking, Mary Byrne; you're an old, flagrant heathen, and I'll stay no more with the lot of you. (*He rises.*)

MARY, *catching hold of him.*

Stop till you say a prayer, your reverence; stop till you say a little prayer, I'm telling you, and I'll give you my blessing and the last sup from the jug.

PRIEST, *breaking away.*

Leave me go, Mary Byrne; for I never met your like for hard abominations the score and two years I'm living in the place.

MARY, *innocently.*

Is that the truth?

PRIEST.

It is, then, and God have mercy on your soul.

The Priest goes towards the left, and Sarah follows him.

SARAH, *in a low voice.*

And what time will you do the thing I'm asking, holy father? for I'm thinking you'll do it surely, and not have me growing into an old, wicked heathen like herself.

MARY, *calling out shrilly.*

Let you be walking back here, Sarah Casey, and not be talking whisper-talk with the like of him in the face of the Almighty God.

SARAH, *to the priest.*

Do you hear her now, your reverence? Isn't it

true, surely, she's an old, flagrant heathen, would destroy the world.

PRIEST, *to Sarah, moving off.*

Well, I'll be coming down early to the chapel, and let you come to me a while after you see me passing, and bring the bit of gold along with you, and the tin can. I'll marry you for them two, though it's a pitiful small sum; for I wouldn't be easy in my soul if I left you growing into an old, wicked heathen the like of her.

SARAH, *following him out.*

The blessing of the Almighty God be on you, holy father, and that He may reward and watch you from this present day.

MARY, *nudging Michael.*

Did you see that, Michael Byrne? Didn't you hear me telling you she's flighty a while back since the change of the moon? With her fussing for marriage, and she making whisper-talk with one man or another man along by the road.

MICHAEL.

Whisht now, or she'll knock the head of you the time she comes back.

MARY.

Ah, it's a bad, wicked way the world is this night, if there's a fine air in it itself. You'd never have seen me, and I a young woman, making whisper-talk with the like of him, and he the fearfullest old fellow you'd see any place walking the world. (*Sarah comes back quickly.*)

MARY, *calling out to her.*

What is it you're after whispering above with himself?

SARAH, *exultingly.*

Lie down, and leave us in peace.

She whispers with Michael.

MARY, *poking out her pipe with a straw, sings:*

She'd whisper with one, and she'd whisper with two——

She breaks off coughing.

My singing voice is gone for this night, Sarah Casey. (*She lights her pipe.*) But if it's flighty you are itself, you're a grand handsome woman, the glory of tinkers, the pride of Wicklow, the Beauty of Ballinacree. I wouldn't have you lying down and you lonesome to sleep this night in a dark ditch when the spring is coming in

the trees; so let you sit down there by the big bough, and I'll be telling you the finest story you'd hear any place from Dundalk to Ballinacree, with great queens in it, making themselves matches from the start to the end, and they with shiny silks on them the length of the day and white shifts for the night.

MICHAEL, *standing up with the tin can in his hand.*

Let you go asleep, and not have us destroyed.

MARY, *crying back sleepily.*

Don't mind him, Sarah Casey. Sit down now, and I'll be telling you a story would be fit to tell a woman the like of you in the spring-time of the year.

SARAH, *taking the can from Michael, and tying it up in a piece of sacking.*

That'll not be rusting now in the dews of night. I'll put it up in the ditch the way it will be handy in the morning; and now we've that done, Michael Byrne, I'll go along with you and welcome for Tim Flaherty's hens.

She puts the can in the ditch.

MARY, *sleepily.*

I've a grand story of the great queens of Ireland, with white necks on them the like of Sarah Casey, and fine arms would hit you a slap the way Sarah Casey would hit you.

SARAH, *beckoning on the left.*

Come along now, Michael, while she's falling asleep.

He goes towards the left. Mary sees that they are going, starts up suddenly, and turns over on her hands and knees.

MARY, *piteously.*

Where is it you're going? Let you walk back here, and not be leaving me lonesome when the night is fine.

SARAH.

Don't be waking the world with your talk when we're going up through the back wood to get two of Tim Flaherty's hens are roosting in the ash-tree above at the well.

MARY.

And it's leaving me lone you are? Come back

here, Sarah Casey. Come back here, I'm saying; or if it's off you must go leave me the two little coppers you have, the way I can walk up in a short while, and get another pint for my sleep.

SARAH.

It's too much you have taken. Let you stretch yourself out and take a long sleep; for isn't that the best thing any woman can do, and she an old drinking heathen like yourself.

She and Michael go out left.

MARY, *standing up slowly.*

It's gone they are, and I with my feet that weak under me you'd knock me down with a rush; and my head with a noise in it the like of what you'd hear in a stream and it running between two rocks and rain falling. (*She goes over to the ditch where the can is tied in sacking, and takes it down.*) What good am I this night, God help me? What good are the grand stories I have when it's few would listen to an old woman, few but a girl maybe would be in great fear the time her hour was come, or a little child wouldn't be sleeping with the hunger on a cold night? (*She takes the can from the sacking, and fits in three empty bottles and*

straw in its place, and ties them up.) Maybe the two of them have a good right to be walking out the little short while they'd be young; but if they have itself, they'll not keep Mary Byrne from her full pint when the night's fine, and there's a dry moon in the sky. (*She takes up the can and puts the package back in the ditch.*) Jemmy Neill's a decent lad; and he'll give me a good drop for the can; and maybe if I keep near the peelers to-morrow for the first bit of the fair, herself won't strike me at all; and if she does itself, what's a little stroke on your head beside sitting lonesome on a fine night, hearing the dogs barking, and the bats squeaking, and you saying over, it's a short while only till you die.

She goes out singing 'The night before Larry was stretched.'

CURTAIN.

ACT II

The same scene as before. Early morning. Sarah is washing her face in an old bucket; then plaits her hair. Michael is tidying himself also. Mary Byrne is asleep against the ditch.

SARAH, *to Michael, with pleased excitement.*

Go over, now, to the bundle beyond, and you'll find a kind of a red handkerchief to put upon your neck, and the green one for myself.

MICHAEL, *getting them.*

You're after spending more money on the like of them. Well, it's a power we're losing this time, and we not gaining a thing at all. (*With the handkerchiefs.*) Is it them two?

SARAH.

It is, Michael. (*She takes one of them.*) Let you tackle that one round under your chin; and let you not forget to take your hat from your head when we go up into the church. I asked Biddy Flynn below, that's after marrying her second

man, and she told me it's the like of that they do.

Mary yawns, and turns over in her sleep.

SARAH, *with anxiety.*

There she is waking up on us, and I thinking we'd have the job done before she'd know of it at all.

MICHAEL.

She'll be crying out now, and making game of us, and saying it's fools we are surely.

SARAH.

I'll send her to her sleep again, or get her out of it one way or another; for it'd be a bad case to have a divil's scholar the like of her turning the priest against us maybe with her godless talk.

MARY, *waking up, and looking at them with curiosity, blandly.*

That's fine things you have on you, Sarah Casey; and it's a great stir you're making this day, washing your face. I'm that used to the hammer, I wouldn't hear it at all; but washing is a

rare thing, and you're after waking me up, and I having a great sleep in the sun.

She looks around cautiously at the bundle in which she has hidden the bottles.

SARAH, *coaxingly.*

Let you stretch out again for a sleep, Mary Byrne; for it'll be a middling time yet before we go to the fair.

MARY, *with suspicion.*

That's a sweet tongue you have, Sarah Casey; but if sleep's a grand thing, it's a grand thing to be waking up a day the like of this, when there's a warm sun in it, and a kind air, and you'll hear the cuckoos singing and crying out on the top of the hills.

SARAH.

If it's that gay you are, you'd have a right to walk down and see would you get a few halfpence from the rich men do be driving early to the fair.

MARY.

When rich men do be driving early it's queer tempers they have, the Lord forgive them; the

way it's little but bad words and swearing out you'd get from them all.

SARAH, *losing her temper and breaking out fiercely.*

Then if you'll neither beg nor sleep, let you walk off from this place where you're not wanted, and not have us waiting for you maybe at the turn of day.

MARY, *rather uneasy, turning to Michael.*

God help our spirits, Michael ; there she is again rousing cranky from the break of dawn. Oh ! isn't she a terror since the moon did change ? (*she gets up slowly*) and I'd best be going forward to sell the gallon can.

She goes over and takes up the bundle.

SARAH, *crying out angrily.*

Leave that down, Mary Byrne. Oh ! aren't you the scorn of women to think that you'd have that drouth and roguery on you that you'd go drinking the can and the dew not dried from the grass ?

MARY, *in a feigned tone of pacification, with the bundle still in her hand.*

It's not a drouth but a heartburn I have this day,

Sarah Casey, so I'm going down to cool my gullet at the blessed well; and I'll sell the can to the parson's daughter below, a harmless poor creature would fill your hand with shillings for a brace of lies.

SARAH.

Leave down the tin can, Mary Byrne, for I hear the drouth upon your tongue to-day.

MARY.

There's not a drink-house from this place to the fair, Sarah Casey; the way you'll find me below with the full price, and not a farthing gone.

She turns to go off left.

SARAH, *jumping up, and picking up the hammer threateningly.*

Put down that can, I'm saying.

MARY, *looking at her for a moment in terror, and putting down the bundle in the ditch.*

Is it raving mad you're going, Sarah Casey, and you the pride of women to destroy the world?

SARAH, *going up to her, and giving her a push off left.*

I'll show you if it's raving mad I am. Go on from this place, I'm saying, and be wary now.

MARY, *turning back after her.*

If I go, I'll be telling old and young you're a weathered heathen savage, Sarah Casey, the one did put down a head of the parson's cabbage to boil in the pot with your clothes (*the priest comes in behind her, on the left, and listens*), and quenched the flaming candles on the throne of God the time your shadow fell within the pillars of the chapel door.

Sarah turns on her, and she springs round nearly into the priest's arms. When she sees him, she claps her shawl over her mouth, and goes up towards the ditch, laughing to herself.

PRIEST, *going to Sarah, half terrified at the language that he has heard.*

Well, aren't you a fearful lot? I'm thinking it's only humbug you were making at the fall of night, and you won't need me at all.

SARAH, *with anger still in her voice.*

Humbug is it! Would you be turning back upon your spoken promise in the face of God?

PRIEST, *dubiously.*

I'm thinking you were never christened, Sarah Casey; and it would be a queer job to go dealing Christian sacraments unto the like of you. (*Persuasively, feeling in his pocket.*) So it would be best, maybe, I'd give you a shilling for to drink my health, and let you walk on, and not trouble me at all.

SARAH.

That's your talking, is it? If you don't stand to your spoken word, holy father, I'll make my own complaint to the mitred bishop in the face of all.

PRIEST.

You'd do that!

SARAH.

I would surely, holy father, if I walked to the city of Dublin with blood and blisters on my naked feet.

PRIEST, *uneasily scratching his ear.*

I wish this day was done, Sarah Casey; for I'm thinking it's a risky thing getting mixed in any matters with the like of you.

SARAH.

Be hasty then, and you'll have us done with before you'd think at all.

PRIEST, *giving in.*

Well, maybe it's right you are, and let you come up to the chapel when you see me looking from the door. (*He goes up into the chapel.*)

SARAH, *calling after him.*

We will, and God preserve you, holy father.

MARY, *coming down to them, speaking with amazement and consternation, but without anger.*

Going to the chapel! It's at marriage you're fooling again, maybe? (*Sarah turns her back on her.*) It was for that you were washing your face, and you after sending me for porter at the fall of night the way I'd drink a good half from the jug? (*Going round in front of Sarah.*) Is it at marriage you're fooling again?

SARAH, *triumphantly.*

It is, Mary Byrne. I'll be married now in a short while; and from this day there will no one have a right to call me a dirty name and I

selling cans in Wicklow or Wexford or the city of Dublin itself.

MARY, *turning to Michael.*

And it's yourself is wedding her, Michael Byrne?

MICHAEL, *gloomily.*

It is, God spare us.

MARY, *looks at Sarah for a moment, and then bursts out into a laugh of derision.*

Well, she's a tight, hardy girl, and it's no lie; but I never knew till this day it was a black born fool I had for a son. You'll breed asses, I've heard them say, and poaching dogs, and horses'd go licking the wind, but it's a hard thing, God help me, to breed sense in a son.

MICHAEL, *gloomily.*

If I didn't marry her, she'd be walking off to Jaunting Jim maybe at the fall of night; and it's well yourself knows there isn't the like of her for getting money and selling songs to the men.

MARY.

And you're thinking it's paying gold to his

reverence would make a woman stop when she's a mind to go?

SARAH, *angrily.*

Let you not be destroying us with your talk when I've as good a right to a decent marriage as any speckled female does be sleeping in the black hovels above, would choke a mule.

MARY, *soothingly.*

It's as good a right you have, surely, Sarah Casey, but what good will it do? Is it putting that ring on your finger will keep you from getting an aged woman and losing the fine face you have, or be easing your pains, when it's the grand ladies do be married in silk dresses, with rings of gold, that do pass any woman with their share of torment in the hour of birth, and do be paying the doctors in the city of Dublin a great price at that time, the like of what you'd pay for a good ass and a cart? (*She sits down.*)

SARAH, *puzzled.*

Is that the truth?

MARY, *pleased with the point she has made.*

Wouldn't any know it's the truth? Ah, it's few short years you are yet in the world, Sarah

Casey, and it's little or nothing at all maybe you know about it.

SARAH, *vehement but uneasy.*

What is it yourself knows of the fine ladies when they wouldn't let the like of you go near to them at all?

MARY.

If you do be drinking a little sup in one town and another town, it's soon you get great knowledge and a great sight into the world. You'll see men there, and women there, sitting up on the ends of barrels in the dark night, and they making great talk would soon have the like of you, Sarah Casey, as wise as a March hare.

MICHAEL, *to Sarah.*

That's the truth she's saying, and maybe if you've sense in you at all you'd have a right still to leave your fooling, and not be wasting our gold.

SARAH, *decisively.*

If it's wise or fool I am, I've made a good bargain, and I'll stand to it now.

MARY.

What is it he's making you give?

MICHAEL.

The ten shillings in gold, and the tin can is above tied in the sack.

MARY, *looking at the bundle with surprise and dread.*

The bit of gold and the tin can is it?

MICHAEL.

The half a sovereign and the gallon can.

MARY, *scrambling to her feet quickly.*

Well, I think I'll be walking off the road to the fair the way you won't be destroying me going too fast on the hills. (*She goes a few steps towards the left, then turns and speaks to Sarah very persuasively.*) Let you not take the can from the sack, Sarah Casey; for the people is coming above would be making game of you, and pointing their fingers if they seen you do the like of that. Let you leave it safe in the bag, I'm saying, Sarah darling. It's that way will be best.

She goes towards left, and pauses for a moment, looking about her with embarrassment.

MICHAEL, *in a low voice.*

What ails her at all?

SARAH, *anxiously.*

It's real wicked she does be when you hear her speaking as easy as that.

MARY, *to herself.*

I'd be safer in the chapel, I'm thinking; for if she caught me after on the road, maybe she would kill me then.

She comes hobbling back towards the right.

SARAH.

Where is it you're going? It isn't that way we'll be walking to the fair.

MARY.

I'm going up into the chapel to give you my blessing and hear the priest saying his prayers. It's a lonesome road is running below to Greenane, and a woman would never know the things might happen her and she walking single in a lonesome place.

As she reaches the chapel-gate, the priest comes to it in his surplice.

PRIEST, *crying out.*

Come along now. Is it the whole day you'd

keep me here saying my prayers, and I getting my death with not a bit in my stomach, and my breakfast in ruins, and the Lord Bishop maybe driving on the road to-day?

SARAH.

We're coming now, holy father.

PRIEST.

Give me the bit of gold into my hand.

SARAH.

It's here, holy father.

She gives it to him. Michael takes the bundle from the ditch and brings it over, standing a little behind Sarah. He feels the bundle, and looks at Mary with a meaning look.

PRIEST, *looking at the gold.*

It's a good one, I'm thinking, wherever you got it. And where is the can?

SARAH, *taking the bundle.*

We have it here in a bit of clean sack, your reverence. We tied it up in the inside of that to keep it from rusting in the dews of night, and let you not open it now or you'll have the

people making game of us and telling the story on us, east and west to the butt of the hills.

PRIEST, *taking the bundle.*

Give it here into my hand, Sarah Casey. What is it any person would think of a tinker making a can?

He begins opening the bundle.

SARAH.

It's a fine can, your reverence, for if it's poor, simple people we are, it's fine cans we can make, and himself, God help him, is a great man surely at the trade.

Priest opens bundle; the three empty bottles fall out.

SARAH.

Glory to the saints of joy!

PRIEST.

Did ever any man see the like of that? To think you'd be putting deceit on me, and telling lies to me, and I going to marry you for a little sum wouldn't marry a child.

SARAH, *crestfallen and astonished.*

It's the divil did it, your reverence, and I

wouldn't tell you a lie. (*Raising her hands.*) May the Lord Almighty strike me dead if the divil isn't after hooshing the tin can from the bag.

PRIEST, *vehemently.*

Go along now, and don't be swearing your lies. Go along now, and let you not be thinking I'm big fool enough to believe the like of that when it's after selling it you are or making a swap for drink of it, maybe, in the darkness of the night.

MARY, *in a peacemaking voice, putting her hand on the Priest's left arm.*

She wouldn't do the like of that, your reverence, when she hasn't a decent standing drouth on her at all; and she setting great store on her marriage the way you'd have a right to be taking her easy, and not minding the can. What differ would an empty can make with a fine, rich, hardy man the like of you?

SARAH, *imploringly.*

Marry us, your reverence, for the ten shillings in gold, and we'll make you a grand can in the evening—a can would be fit to carry water for the holy man of God. Marry us now and I'll be saying fine prayers for you, morning and

night, if it'd be raining itself, and it'd be in two black pools I'd be setting my knees.

PRIEST, *loudly.*

It's a wicked, thieving, lying, scheming lot you are, the pack of you. Let you walk off now and take every stinking rag you have there from the ditch.

MARY, *putting her shawl over her head.*

Marry her, your reverence, for the love of God, for there'll be queer doings below if you send her off the like of that and she swearing crazy on the road.

SARAH, *angrily.*

It's the truth she's saying ; for it's herself, I'm thinking, is after swapping the tin can for a pint, the time she was raging mad with the drouth, and ourselves above walking the hill.

MARY, *crying out with indignation.*

Have you no shame, Sarah Casey, to tell lies unto a holy man ?

SARAH, *to Mary, working herself into a rage.*

It's making game of me you'd be, and putting a

fool's head on me in the face of the world ; but if you were thinking to be mighty cute walking off, or going up to hide in the church, I've got you this time, and you'll not run from me now.

She seizes one of the bottles.

MARY, *hiding behind the priest.*

Keep her off, your reverence ; keep her off, for the love of the Almighty God. What at all would the Lord Bishop say if he found me here lying with my head broken across, or the two of yous maybe digging a bloody grave for me at the door of the church ?

PRIEST, *waving Sarah off.*

Go along, Sarah Casey. Would you be doing murder at my feet ? Go along from me now, and wasn't I a big fool to have to do with you when it's nothing but distraction and torment I get from the kindness of my heart ?

SARAH, *shouting.*

I've bet a power of strong lads east and west through the world, and are you thinking I'd turn back from a priest ? Leave the road now, or maybe I would strike yourself.

PRIEST.

You would not, Sarah Casey. I've no fear for the lot of you; but let you walk off, I'm saying, and not be coming where you've no business, and screeching tumult and murder at the doorway of the church.

SARAH.

I'll not go a step till I have her head broke, or till I'm wed with himself. If you want to get shut of us, let you marry us now, for I'm thinking the ten shillings in gold is a good price for the like of you, and you near burst with the fat.

PRIEST.

I wouldn't have you coming in on me and soiling my church; for there's nothing at all, I'm thinking, would keep the like of you from hell. (*He throws down the ten shillings on the ground.*) Gather up your gold now, and begone from my sight, for if ever I set an eye on you again you'll hear me telling the peelers who it was stole the black ass belonging to Philly O'Cullen, and whose hay it is the grey ass does be eating.

SARAH.

You'd do that?

PRIEST.

I would, surely.

SARAH.

If you do, you'll be getting all the tinkers from Wicklow and Wexford, and the County Meath, to put up block tin in the place of glass to shield your windows where you do be looking out and blinking at the girls. It's hard set you'll be that time, I'm telling you, to fill the depth of your belly the long days of Lent; for we wouldn't leave a laying pullet in your yard at all.

PRIEST, *losing his temper finally.*

Go on, now, or I'll send the Lords of Justice a dated story of your villainies—burning, stealing, robbing, raping to this mortal day. Go on now, I'm saying, if you'd run from Kilmainham or the rope itself.

MICHAEL, *taking off his coat.*

Is it run from the like of you, holy father? Go up to your own shanty, or I'll beat you with the ass's reins till the world would hear you roaring from this place to the coast of Clare.

PRIEST.

Is it lift your hand upon myself when the

Lord would blight your members if you'd touch me now? Go on from this.

He gives him a shove.

MICHAEL.

Blight me, is it? Take it then, your reverence, and God help you so.

He runs at him with the reins.

PRIEST, *runs up to ditch, crying out.*

There are the peelers passing by the grace of God. Hey, below!

MARY, *clapping her hand over his mouth.*

Knock him down on the road; they didn't hear him at all. (*Michael pulls him down.*)

SARAH.

Gag his jaws.

MARY.

Stuff the sacking in his teeth.

They gag him with the sack that had the can in it.

SARAH.

Tie the bag around his head, and if the peelers

come, we'll put him headfirst in the boghole is beyond the ditch.

They tie him up in some sacking.

MICHAEL, *to Mary.*

Keep him quiet, and the rags tight on him for fear he'd screech. (*He goes back to their camp.*) Hurry with the things, Sarah Casey. The peelers aren't coming this way, and maybe we'll get off from them now.

They bundle the things together in wild haste, the priest wriggling and struggling about on the ground, with old Mary trying to keep him quiet.

MARY, *patting his head.*

Be quiet, your reverence. What is it ails you, with your wriggling now? Is it choking maybe? (*She puts her hand under the sack, and feels his mouth, patting him on the back.*) It's only letting on you are, holy father, for your nose is blowing back and forward as easy as an east wind on an April day. (*In a soothing voice.*) There now, holy father, let you stay easy, I'm telling you, and learn a little sense and patience, the way you'll not be so airy again going to rob poor sinners of their scraps of gold. (*He gets quieter.*) That's a good boy you are now,

your reverence, and let you not be uneasy, for we wouldn't hurt you at all. It's sick and sorry we are to tease you; but what did you want meddling with the like of us, when it's a long time we are going our own ways—father and son, and his son after him, or mother and daughter, and her own daughter again—and it's little need we ever had of going up into a church and swearing—I'm told there's swearing with it—a word no man would believe, or with drawing rings on our fingers, would be cutting our skins maybe when we'd be taking the ass from the shafts, and pulling the straps the time they'd be slippy with going around beneath the heavens in rains falling.

MICHAEL, *who has finished bundling up the things, comes over with Sarah.*

We're fixed now; and I have a mind to run him in a boghole the way he'll not be tattling to the peelers of our games to-day.

SARAH.

You'd have a right too, I'm thinking.

MARY, *soothingly.*

Let you not be rough with him, Sarah Casey, and he after drinking his sup of porter with us

at the fall of night. Maybe he'd swear a mighty oath he wouldn't harm us, and then we'd safer loose him ; for if we went to drown him, they'd maybe hang the batch of us, man and child and woman, and the ass itself.

MICHAEL.

What would he care for an oath ?

MARY.

Don't you know his like do live in terror of the wrath of God ? (*Putting her mouth to the Priest's ear in the sacking.*) Would you swear an oath, holy father, to leave us in our freedom, and not talk at all ? (*Priest nods in sacking.*) Didn't I tell you ? Look at the poor fellow nodding his head off in the bias of the sacks. Strip them off from him, and he'll be easy now.

MICHAEL, *as if speaking to a horse.*

Hold up, holy father.

He pulls the sacking off, and shows the Priest with his hair on end. They free his mouth.

MARY.

Hold him till he swears.

PRIEST, *in a faint voice.*

I swear, surely. If you let me go in peace, I'll

not inform against you or say a thing at all, and may God forgive me for giving heed unto your like to-day.

SARAH, *puts the ring on his finger.*

There's the ring, holy father, to keep you minding of your oath until the end of time; for my heart's scalded with your fooling; and it'll be a long day till I go making talk of marriage or the like of that.

MARY, *complacently, standing up slowly.*

She's vexed now, your reverence; and let you not mind her at all, for she's right, surely, and it's little need we ever had of the like of you to get us our bit to eat, and our bit to drink, and our time of love when we were young men and women, and were fine to look at.

MICHAEL.

Hurry on now. He's a great man to have kept us from fooling our gold; and we'll have a great time drinking that bit with the trampers on the green of Clash.

They gather up their things. The Priest stands up.

PRIEST, *lifting up his hand.*

I've sworn not to call the hand of man upon your crimes to-day; but I haven't sworn I wouldn't call the fire of heaven from the hand of the Almighty God.

He begins saying a Latin malediction in a loud ecclesiastical voice.

MARY.

There's an old villain.

ALL, *together.*

Run, run. Run for your lives.

They rush out, leaving the Priest master of the situation.

CURTAIN.

RIDERS TO THE SEA

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

MAURYA, *an old Woman*

BARTLEY, *her Son*

CATHLEEN, *her Daughter*

NORA, *a younger Daughter*

MEN AND WOMEN

SCENE—An Island off the West of Ireland

RIDERS TO THE SEA

Cottage kitchen, with nets, oilskins, spinning-wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. Cathleen, a girl of about twenty, finishes kneading cake, and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire; then wipes her hands, and begins to spin at the wheel. Nora, a young girl, puts her head in at the door.

NORA, *in a low voice.*

Where is she?

CATHLEEN.

She's lying down, God help her, and maybe sleeping, if she's able.

Nora comes in softly and takes a bundle from under her shawl.

CATHLEEN, *spinning the wheel rapidly.*

What is it you have?

NORA.

The young priest is after bringing them. It's

a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal.

Cathleen stops her wheel with a sudden movement, and leans out to listen.

NORA.

We're to find out if it's Michael's they are, some time herself will be down looking by the sea.

CATHLEEN.

How would they be Michael's, Nora? How would he go the length of that way to the far north?

NORA.

The young priest says he's known the like of it. "If it's Michael's they are," says he, "you can tell herself he's got a clean burial, by the grace of God; and if they're not his, let no one say a word about them, for she'll be getting her death," says he, "with crying and lamenting."

The door which Nora half closed is blown open by a gust of wind.

CATHLEEN, *looking out anxiously.*

Did you ask him would he stop Bartley going this day with the horses to the Galway fair?

NORA.

"I won't stop him," says he; "but let you not be afraid. Herself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute," says he, "with no son living."

CATHLEEN.

Is the sea bad by the white rocks, Nora?

NORA.

Middling bad, God help us. There's a great roaring in the west, and it's worse it'll be getting when the tide's turned to the wind. (*She goes over to the table with the bundle.*) Shall I open it now?

CATHLEEN.

Maybe she'd wake up on us, and come in before we'd done (*coming to the table*). It's a long time we'll be, and the two of us crying.

NORA, *goes to the inner door and listens.*

She's moving about on the bed. She'll be coming in a minute.

CATHLEEN.

Give me the ladder, and I'll put them up in

the turf-loft, the way she won't know of them at all, and maybe when the tide turns she'll be going down to see would he be floating from the east.

They put the ladder against the gable of the chimney; Cathleen goes up a few steps and hides the bundle in the turf-loft. Maurya comes from the inner room.

MAURYA, *looking up at Cathleen and speaking querulously.*

Isn't it turf enough you have for this day and evening?

CATHLEEN.

There's a cake baking at the fire for a short space (*throwing down the turf*), and Bartley will want it when the tide turns if he goes to Connemara.

Nora picks up the turf and puts it round the pot-oven.

MAURYA, *sitting down on a stool at the fire.*

He won't go this day with the wind rising from the south and west. He won't go this day, for the young priest will stop him surely.

NORA.

He'll not stop him, mother; and I heard

Eamon Simon and Stephen Pheety and Colum Shawn saying he would go.

MAURYA.

Where is he itself?

NORA.

He went down to see would there be another boat sailing in the week, and I'm thinking it won't be long till he's here now, for the tide's turning at the green head, and the hooker's tacking from the east.

CATHLEEN.

I hear some one passing the big stones.

NORA, *looking out.*

He's coming now, and he in a hurry.

BARTLEY, *comes in and looks round the room. Speaking sadly and quietly.*

Where is the bit of new rope, Cathleen, was bought in Connemara?

CATHLEEN, *coming down.*

Give it to him, Nora; it's on a nail by the white boards. I hung it up this morning, for the pig with the black feet was eating it.

NORA, *giving him a rope.*

Is that it, Bartley ?

MAURYA.

You'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley, hanging by the boards. (*Bartley takes the rope.*) It will be wanting in this place, I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up to-morrow morning, or the next morning, or any morning in the week; for it's a deep grave we'll make him, by the grace of God.

BARTLEY, *beginning to work with the rope.*

I've no halter the way I can ride down on the mare, and I must go now quickly. This is the one boat going for two weeks or beyond it, and the fair will be a good fair for horses, I heard them saying below.

MAURYA.

It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin, and I after giving a big price for the finest white boards you'd find in Connemara. (*She looks round at the boards.*)

BARTLEY.

How would it be washed up, and we after

looking each day for nine days, and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and south?

MAURYA.

If it isn't found itself, that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the moon, and it rising in the night. If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses, you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only.

BARTLEY, *working at the halter, to Cathleen.*

Let you go down each day, and see the sheep aren't jumping in on the rye, and if the jobber comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going.

MAURYA.

How would the like of her get a good price for a pig.

BARTLEY, *to Cathleen.*

If the west wind holds with the last bit of the moon let you and Nora get up weed enough for another cock for the kelp. It's hard set we'll be from this day with no one in it but one man to work.

MAURYA.

It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drowned with the rest. What way will I live and the girls with me, and I an old woman looking for the grave?

Bartley lays down the halter, takes off his old coat, and puts on a newer one of the same flannel.

BARTLEY, *to Nora.*

Is she coming to the pier?

NORA, *looking out.*

She's passing the green head and letting fall her sails.

BARTLEY, *getting his purse and tobacco.*

I'll have half an hour to go down, and you'll see me coming again in two days, or in three days, or maybe in four days if the wind is bad.

MAURYA, *turning round to the fire and putting the shawl over her head.*

Isn't it a hard and cruel man won't hear a word from an old woman, and she holding him from the sea?

CATHLEEN.

It's the life of a young man to be going on the

sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over?

BARTLEY, *taking the halter.*

I must go now quickly. I'll ride down on the red mare, and the grey pony'll run behind me. . . . The blessing of God on you.

He goes out.

MAURYA, *crying out as he is in the door.*

He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world.

CATHLEEN.

Why wouldn't you give him your blessing and he looking round in the door? Isn't it sorrow enough is on everyone in this house without your sending him out with an unlucky word behind him, and a hard word in his ear?

Maurya takes up the tongs and begins raking the fire aimlessly without looking round.

NORA, *turning towards her.*

You're taking away the turf from the cake.

CATHLEEN, *crying out.*

The Son of God forgive us, Nora, we're after forgetting his bit of bread.

She comes over to the fire.

NORA.

And it's destroyed he'll be going till dark night, and he after eating nothing since the sun went up.

CATHLEEN, *turning the cake out of the oven.*

It's destroyed he'll be, surely. There's no sense left on any person in a house where an old woman will be talking for ever.

Maurya sways herself on her stool.

CATHLEEN, *cutting off some of the bread and rolling it in a cloth; to Maurya.*

Let you go down now to the spring well and give him this and he passing. You'll see him then and the dark word will be broken, and you can say "God speed you," the way he'll be easy in his mind.

MAURYA, *taking the bread.*

Will I be in it as soon as himself?

CATHLEEN.

If you go now quickly.

MAURYA, *standing up unsteadily.*

It's hard set I am to walk.

CATHLEEN, *looking at her anxiously.*

Give her the stick, Nora, or maybe she'll slip on the big stones.

NORA.

What stick?

CATHLEEN.

The stick Michael brought from Connemara.

MAURYA, *taking a stick Nora gives her.*

In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old.

She goes out slowly. Nora goes over to the ladder.

CATHLEEN.

Wait, Nora, maybe she'd turn back quickly. She's that sorry, God help her, you wouldn't know the thing she'd do.

NORA.

Is she gone round by the bush?

CATHLEEN, *looking out.*

She's gone now. Throw it down quickly, for the Lord knows when she'll be out of it again.

NORA, *getting the bundle from the loft.*

The young priest said he'd be passing to-morrow, and we might go down and speak to him below if it's Michael's they are surely.

CATHLEEN, *taking the bundle.*

Did he say what way they were found?

NORA, *coming down.*

"There were two men," says he, "and they rowing round with poteen before the cocks crowed, and the oar of one of them caught the body, and they passing the black cliffs of the north."

CATHLEEN, *trying to open the bundle.*

Give me a knife, Nora; the string's perished with the salt water, and there's a black knot on it you wouldn't loosen in a week.

NORA, *giving her a knife.*

I've heard tell it was a long way to Donegal.

CATHLEEN, *cutting the string.*

It is surely. There was a man in here a while ago—the man sold us that knife—and he said if you set off walking from the rocks beyond, it would be in seven days you'd be in Donegal.

NORA.

And what time would a man take, and he floating?

Cathleen opens the bundle and takes out a bit of a shirt and a stocking. They look at them eagerly.

CATHLEEN, *in a low voice.*

The Lord spare us, Nora! isn't it a queer hard thing to say if it's his they are surely?

NORA.

I'll get his shirt off the hook the way we can put the one flannel on the other. (*She looks through some clothes hanging in the corner.*) It's not with them, Cathleen, and where will it be?

CATHLEEN.

I'm thinking Bartley put it on him in the

morning, for his own shirt was heavy with the salt in it. (*Pointing to the corner.*) There's a bit of a sleeve was of the same stuff. Give me that and it will do. (*Nora brings it to her and they compare the flannel.*) It's the same stuff, Nora; but if it is itself aren't there great rolls of it in the shops of Galway, and isn't it many another man may have a shirt of it as well as Michael himself?

NORA, *who has taken up the stocking and counted the stitches, crying out.*

It's Michael, Cathleen, it's Michael; God spare his soul, and what will herself say when she hears this story, and Bartley on the sea?

CATHLEEN, *taking the stocking.*

It's a plain stocking.

NORA.

It's the second one of the third pair I knitted, and I put up three-score stitches, and I dropped four of them.

CATHLEEN, *counts the stitches.*

It's that number is in it (*crying out*). Ah, Nora, isn't it a bitter thing to think of him floating

that way to the far north, and no one to keen him but the black hags that do be flying on the sea?

NORA, *swinging herself half round, and throwing out her arms on the clothes.*

And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?

CATHLEEN, *after an instant.*

Tell me is herself coming, Nora? I hear a little sound on the path.

NORA, *looking out.*

She is, Cathleen. She's coming up to the door.

CATHLEEN.

Put these things away before she'll come in. Maybe it's easier she'll be after giving her blessing to Bartley, and we won't let on we've heard anything the time he's on the sea.

NORA, *helping Cathleen to close the bundle.*

We'll put them here in the corner.

They put them into a hole in the chimney corner. Cathleen goes back to the spinning-wheel.

NORA.

Will she see it was crying I was?

CATHLEEN.

Keep your back to the door the way the light'll not be on you.

Nora sits down at the chimney corner, with her back to the door. Maurya comes in very slowly, without looking at the girls, and goes over to her stool at the other side of the fire. The cloth with the bread is still in her hand. The girls look at each other, and Nora points to the bundle of bread.

CATHLEEN, *after spinning for a moment.*

You didn't give him his bit of bread?

Maurya begins to keen softly, without turning round.

CATHLEEN.

Did you see him riding down?

Maurya goes on keening.

CATHLEEN, *a little impatiently.*

God forgive you; isn't it a better thing to raise your voice and tell what you seen, than to be making lamentation for a thing that's done? Did you see Bartley, I'm saying to you?

MAURYA, *with a weak voice.*

My heart's broken from this day.

CATHLEEN, *as before.*

Did you see Bartley?

MAURYA.

I seen the fearfullest thing.

CATHLEEN, *leaves her wheel and looks out.*

God forgive you; he's riding the mare now over the green head, and the grey pony behind him.

MAURYA, *starts, so that her shawl falls back from her head and shows her white tossed hair. With a frightened voice.*

The grey pony behind him . . .

CATHLEEN, *coming to the fire.*

What is it ails you at all?

MAURYA, *speaking very slowly.*

I've seen the fearfullest thing any person has seen since the day Bride Dara seen the dead man with the child in his arms.

CATHLEEN *and* NORA.

Uah.

They crouch down in front of the old woman at the fire.

NORA.

Tell us what it is you seen.

MAURYA.

I went down to the spring well, and I stood there saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along, and he riding on the red mare with the grey pony behind him (*she puts up her hands, as if to hide something from her eyes*). The Son of God spare us, Nora!

CATHLEEN.

What is it you seen.

MAURYA.

I seen Michael himself.

CATHLEEN, *speaking softly.*

You did not, mother. It wasn't Michael you seen, for his body is after being found in the far north, and he's got a clean burial, by the grace of God.

MAURYA, *a little defiantly.*

I'm after seeing him this day, and he riding and

galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare, and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly; and "the blessing of God on you," says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the grey pony, and there was Michael upon it—with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet.

CATHLEEN, *begins to keen.*

It's destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed, surely.

NORA.

Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God won't leave her destitute with no son living?

MAURYA, *in a low voice, but clearly.*

It's little the like of him knows of the sea. . . . Bartley will be lost now, and let you call in Eamon and make me a good coffin out of the white boards, for I won't live after them. I've had a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons in this house—six fine men, though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming to the world—and some of them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now the lot of them. . . . There were Stephen and Shawn were lost in

the great wind, and found after in the Bay of Gregory of the Golden Mouth, and carried up the two of them on one plank, and in by that door.

She pauses for a moment, the girls start as if they heard something through the door that is half open behind them.

NORA, *in a whisper.*

Did you hear that, Cathleen? Did you hear a noise in the north-east?

CATHLEEN, *in a whisper.*

There's some one after crying out by the seashore.

MAURYA, *continues without hearing anything.*

There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night, and not a stick or sign was seen of them when the sun went up. There was Patch after was drowned out of a curragh that was turned over. I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a baby lying on my two knees, and I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves and not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half

of a red sail, and water dripping out of it—it was a dry day, Nora—and leaving a track to the door.

She pauses again with her hand stretched out towards the door. It opens softly and old women begin to come in, crossing themselves on the threshold, and kneeling down in front of the stage with red petticoats over their heads.

MAURYA, *half in a dream, to Cathleen.*

Is it Patch, or Michael, or what is it at all?

CATHLEEN.

Michael is after being found in the far north, and when he is found there how could he be here in this place?

MAURYA.

There does be a power of young men floating round in the sea, and what way would they know if it was Michael they had, or another man like him, for when a man is nine days in the sea, and the wind blowing, it's hard set his own mother would be to say what man was in it.

CATHLEEN.

It's Michael, God spare him, for they're after

sending us a bit of his clothes from the far north.

She reaches out and hands Maurya the clothes that belonged to Michael. Maurya stands up slowly, and takes them in her hands. Nora looks out.

NORA.

They're carrying a thing among them, and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones.

CATHLEEN, *in a whisper to the women who have come in.*

Is it Bartley it is?

ONE OF THE WOMEN.

It is, surely, God rest his soul.

Two younger women come in and pull out the table. Then men carry in the body of Bartley, laid on a plank, with a bit of a sail over it, and lay it on the table.

CATHLEEN, *to the women as they are doing so.*

What way was he drowned?

ONE OF THE WOMEN.

The grey pony knocked him over into the sea,

and he was washed out where there is a great surf on the white rocks.

Maurya has gone over and knelt down at the head of the table. The women are keening softly and swaying themselves with a slow movement. Cathleen and Nora kneel at the other end of the table. The men kneel near the door.

MAURYA, *raising her head and speaking as if she did not see the people around her.*

They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me. . . . I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening. (*To Nora.*) Give me the Holy Water, Nora; there's a small sup still on the dresser. (*Nora gives it to her.*)

MAURYA, *drops Michael's clothes across Bartley's feet, and sprinkles the Holy Water over him.*

It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't

said prayers in the dark night till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying; but it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time, surely. It's a great rest I'll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain, if it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and maybe a fish that would be stinking.

She kneels down again, crossing herself, and saying prayers under her breath.

CATHLEEN, *to an old man.*

Maybe yourself and Eamon would make a coffin when the sun rises. We have fine white boards herself bought, God help her, thinking Michael would be found, and I have a new cake you can eat while you'll be working.

THE OLD MAN, *looking at the boards.*

Are there nails with them?

CATHLEEN.

There are not, Colum; we didn't think of the nails.

ANOTHER MAN.

It's a great wonder she wouldn't think of the nails, and all the coffins she's seen made already

CATHLEEN.

It's getting old she is, and broken.

Maurya stands up again very slowly and spreads out the pieces of Michael's clothes beside the body, sprinkling them with the last of the Holy Water.

NORA, *in a whisper to Cathleen.*

She's quiet now and easy ; but the day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well. It's fonder she was of Michael, and would anyone have thought that ?

CATHLEEN, *slowly and clearly.*

An old woman will be soon tired with anything she will do, and isn't it nine days herself is after crying and keening, and making great sorrow in the house ?

MAURYA, *puts the empty cup mouth downwards on the table, and lays her hands together on Bartley's feet.*

They're all together this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn (*bending her head*) ; and may He have

mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world.

She pauses, and the keen rises a little more loudly from the women, then sinks away.

MAURYA, *continuing.*

Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied.

She kneels down again and the curtain falls slowly.

THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

DAN BURKE, *Farmer and Herd*

NORA BURKE, *his Wife*

MICHAEL DARA, *a young Herd*

A TRAMP

SCENE—The last cottage at the head of a long glen in County Wicklow

THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN

Cottage kitchen; turf-fire on the right; a bed near it against the wall, with a body lying on it covered with a sheet. A door is at the other end of the room, with a low table near it, and stools, or wooden chairs. There are a couple of glasses on the table, and a bottle of whisky, as if for a wake, with two cups, a teapot, and a home-made cake. There is another small door near the bed. Nora Burke is moving about the room, settling a few things, and lighting candles on the table, looking now and then at the bed with an uneasy look. Some one knocks softly at the door. She takes up a stocking with money from the table and puts it in her pocket. Then she opens the door.

TRAMP, *outside.*

Good evening to you, lady of the house.

NORA.

Good evening kindly, stranger; it's a wild night,
God help you, to be out in the rain falling.

TRAMP.

It is, surely, and I walking to Brittas from the Aughrim fair.

NORA.

Is it walking on your feet, stranger?

TRAMP.

On my two feet, lady of the house, and when I saw the light below I thought maybe if you'd a sup of new milk and a quiet, decent corner where a man could sleep . . . (*he looks in past her and sees the dead man*). The Lord have mercy on us all!

NORA.

It doesn't matter anyway, stranger; come in out of the rain.

TRAMP, *coming in slowly and going towards the bed.*

Is it departed he is?

NORA.

It is, stranger. He's after dying on me, God forgive him, and there I am now with a hundred sheep beyond on the hills, and no turf drawn for the winter.

TRAMP, *looking closely at the dead man.*

It's a queer look is on him for a man that's dead.

NORA, *half-humorously.*

He was always queer, stranger; and I suppose them that's queer and they living men will be queer bodies after.

TRAMP.

Isn't it a great wonder you're letting him lie there, and he not tidied, or laid out itself?

NORA, *coming to the bed.*

I was afeard, stranger, for he put a black curse on me this morning if I'd touch his body the time he'd die sudden, or let anyone touch it except his sister only, and it's ten miles away she lives, in the big glen over the hill.

TRAMP, *looking at her and nodding slowly.*

It's a queer story he wouldn't let his own wife touch him, and he dying quiet in his bed.

NORA.

He was an old man, and an odd man, stranger, and it's always up on the hills he was, thinking thoughts in the dark mist . . . (*she pulls back a*

bit of the sheet). Lay your hand on him now, and tell me if it's cold he is surely.

TRAMP.

Is it getting the curse on me you'd be, woman of the house? I wouldn't lay my hand on him for the Lough Nahanagan and it filled with gold.

NORA, *looking uneasily at the body.*

Maybe cold would be no sign of death with the like of him, for he was always cold, every day since I knew him . . . and every night, stranger . . . (*she covers up his face and comes away from the bed*); but I'm thinking it's dead he is surely, for he's complaining a while back of a pain in his heart, and this morning, the time he was going off to Brittas for three days or four, he was taken with a sharp turn. Then he went into his bed, and he was saying it was destroyed he was, the time the shadow was going up through the glen, and when the sun set on the bog beyond he made a great lep, and let a great cry out of him, and stiffened himself out the like of a dead sheep.

TRAMP, *crosses himself.*

God rest his soul.

NORA, *pouring him out a glass of whisky.*

Maybe that would do you better than the milk of the sweetest cow in County Wicklow.

TRAMP.

The Almighty God reward you and may it be to your good health. (*He drinks.*)

NORA, *giving him a pipe and tobacco.*

I've no pipes saving his own, stranger, but they're sweet pipes to smoke.

TRAMP.

Thank you kindly, lady of the house.

NORA.

Sit down now, stranger, and be taking your rest.

TRAMP, *filling a pipe and looking about the room.*

I've walked a great way through the world, lady of the house, and seen great wonders, but I never seen a wake till this day with fine spirits, and good tobacco, and the best of pipes, and no one to taste them but a woman only.

NORA.

Didn't you hear me say it was only after dying

on me he was when the sun went down, and how would I go out into the glen and tell the neighbours, and I a lone woman with no house near me?

TRAMP, *drinking.*

There's no offence, lady of the house?

NORA.

No offence in life, stranger. How would the like of you, passing in the dark night, know the lonesome way I was with no house near me at all?

TRAMP, *sitting down.*

I knew rightly. (*He lights his pipe, so that there is a sharp light beneath his haggard face.*) And I was thinking, and I coming in through the door, that it's many a lone woman would be afeard of the like of me in the dark night, in a place wouldn't be as lonesome as this place, where there aren't two living souls would see the little light you have shining from the glass.

NORA, *slowly.*

I'm thinking many would be afeard, but I never knew what way I'd be afeard of beggar or bishop or any man of you at all . . . (*she looks towards the window and lowers her voice*). It's other

things than the like of you, stranger, would make a person afeard.

TRAMP, *looking round with a half-shudder.*

It is surely, God help us all!

NORA, *looking at him for a moment with curiosity.*

You're saying that, stranger, as if you were easy afeard.

TRAMP, *speaking mournfully.*

Is it myself, lady of the house, that does be walking round in the long nights, and crossing the hills when the fog is on them, the time a little stick would seem as big as your arm, and a rabbit as big as a bay horse, and a stack of turf as big as a towering church in the city of Dublin? If myself was easy afeard, I'm telling you, it's long ago I'd have been locked into the Richmond Asylum, or maybe have run up into the back hills with nothing on me but an old shirt, and been eaten by the crows the like of Patch Darcy —the Lord have mercy on him—in the year that's gone.

NORA, *with interest.*

You knew Darcy?

TRAMP.

Wasn't I the last one heard his living voice in the whole world?

NORA.

There were great stories of what was heard at that time, but would anyone believe the things they do be saying in the glen?

TRAMP.

It was no lie, lady of the house. . . . I was passing below on a dark night the like of this night, and the sheep were lying under the ditch and every one of them coughing and choking like an old man, with the great rain and the fog. Then I heard a thing talking—queer talk, you wouldn't believe it at all, and you out of your dreams—and "Merciful God," says I, "if I begin hearing the like of that voice out of the thick mist, I'm destroyed surely." Then I run and I run till I was below in Rathvanna. I got drunk that night, I got drunk in the morning, and drunk the day after—I was coming from the races beyond—and the third day they found Darcy. . . . Then I knew it was himself I was after hearing, and I wasn't afeard any more.

NORA, *speaking sorrowfully and slowly.*

God spare Darcy; he'd always look in here and

he passing up or passing down, and it's very lonesome I was after him a long while (*she looks over at the bed and lowers her voice, speaking very slowly*), and then I got happy again—if it's ever happy we are, stranger—for I got used to being lonesome. (*A short pause, then she stands up.*) Was there anyone on the last bit of the road, stranger, and you coming from Aughrim?

TRAMP.

There was a young man with a drift of mountain ewes, and he running after them this way and that.

NORA, *with a half-smile.*

Far down, stranger?

TRAMP.

A piece only.

Nora fills the kettle and puts it on the fire.

NORA.

Maybe, if you're not overafeard, you'd stay here a short while alone with himself.

TRAMP.

I would surely. A man that's dead can do no hurt.

NORA, *speaking with a sort of constraint.*

I'm going a little back to the west, stranger, for himself would go there one night and another and whistle at that place, and then the young man you're after seeing—a kind of a farmer has come up from the sea to live in a cottage beyond —would walk round to see if there was a thing we'd have to be done, and I'm wanting him this night, the way he can go down into the glen when the sun goes up and tell the people that himself is dead.

TRAMP, *looking at the body in the sheet.*

It's myself will go for him, lady of the house, and let you not be destroying yourself with the great rain.

NORA.

You wouldn't find your way, stranger, for there's a small path only, and it running up between two sluigs where an ass and cart would be drowned. (*She puts a shawl over her head.*) Let you be making yourself easy, and saying a prayer for his soul, and it's not long I'll be coming again.

TRAMP, *moving uneasily.*

Maybe if you'd a piece of grey thread and a sharp needle—there's great safety in a needle,

lady of the house—I'd be putting a little stitch here and there in my old coat, the time I'll be praying for his soul, and it going up naked to the saints of God.

NORA, *takes a needle and thread from the front of her dress and gives it to him.*

There's the needle, stranger, and I'm thinking you won't be lonesome, and you used to the back hills, for isn't a dead man itself more company than to be sitting alone, and hearing the winds crying, and you not knowing on what thing your mind would stay?

TRAMP, *slowly.*

It's true, surely, and the Lord have mercy on us all!

Nora goes out. The tramp begins stitching one of the tags in his coat, saying the "De Profundis" under his breath. In an instant the sheet is drawn slowly down, and Dan Burke looks out. The tramp moves uneasily, then looks up, and springs to his feet with a movement of terror.

DAN, *with a hoarse voice.*

Don't be afeard, stranger; a man that's dead can do no hurt.

TRAMP, *trembling.*

I meant no harm, your honour; and won't you

leave me easy to be saying a little prayer for your soul? (*A long whistle is heard outside.*)

DAN, *sitting up in his bed and speaking fiercely.*

Ah, the devil mend her. . . . Do you hear that, stranger? Did ever you hear another woman could whistle the like of that with two fingers in her mouth? (*He looks at the table hurriedly.*) I'm destroyed with the drouth, and let you bring me a drop quickly before herself will come back.

TRAMP, *doubtfully.*

Is it not dead you are?

DAN.

How would I be dead, and I as dry as a baked bone, stranger?

TRAMP, *pouring out the whisky.*

What will herself say if she smells the stuff on you, for I'm thinking it's not for nothing you're letting on to be dead.

DAN.

It is not, stranger, but she won't be coming near me at all, and it's not long now I'll be letting on, for I've a cramp in my back, and my

hip's asleep on me, and there's been the devil's own fly itching my nose. It's near dead I was wanting to sneeze, and you blathering about the rain, and Darcy (*bitterly*)—the devil choke him —and the towering church. (*Crying out impatiently.*) Give me that whisky. Would you have herself come back before I taste a drop at all? (*Tramp gives him the glass.*)

DAN, *after drinking.*

Go over now to that cupboard, and bring me a black stick you'll see in the west corner by the wall.

TRAMP, *taking a stick from the cupboard.*

Is it that, your honour?

DAN.

It is, stranger; it's a long time I'm keeping that stick, for I've a bad wife in the house.

TRAMP, *with a queer look.*

Is it herself, master of the house, and she a grand woman to talk?

DAN.

It's herself, surely, it's a bad wife she is—a bad wife for an old man, and I'm getting old, God

help me, though I've an arm to me still. (*He takes the stick in his hand.*) Let you wait now a short while, and it's a great sight you'll see in this room in two hours or three. (*He stops to listen.*) Is that somebody above?

TRAMP, *listening.*

There's a voice speaking on the path.

DAN.

Put that stick here in the bed and smooth the sheet the way it was lying. (*He covers himself up hastily.*) Be falling to sleep now, and don't let on you know anything, or I'll be having your life. I wouldn't have told you at all but it's destroyed with the drouth I was.

TRAMP, *covering his head.*

Have no fear, master of the house. What is it I know of the like of you that I'd be saying a word or putting out my hand to stay you at all?

He goes back to the fire, sits down on a stool with his back to the bed, and goes on stitching his coat.

DAN, *under the sheet, querulously.*

Stranger!

TRAMP, *quickly.*

Whisht! whisht! Be quiet, I'm telling you; they're coming now at the door.

Nora comes in with Michael Dara, a tall, innocent young man, behind her.

NORA.

I wasn't long at all, stranger, for I met himself on the path.

TRAMP.

You were middling long, lady of the house.

NORA.

There was no sign from himself?

TRAMP.

No sign at all, lady of the house.

NORA, *to Michael.*

Go over now and pull down the sheet, and look on himself, Michael Dara, and you'll see it's the truth I'm telling you.

MICHAEL.

I will not, Nora; I do be afeard of the dead.

He sits down on a stool next the table, facing the tramp. Nora puts the kettle on a lower hook of the pot-hooks, and piles turf under it.

NORA, *turning to tramp.*

Will you drink a sup of tea with myself and the young man, stranger, or (*speaking more persuasively*) will you go into the little room and stretch yourself a short while on the bed? I'm thinking it's destroyed you are walking the length of that way in the great rain.

TRAMP.

Is it go away and leave you, and you having a wake, lady of the house? I will not, surely. (*He takes a drink from his glass, which he has beside him.*) And it's none of your tea I'm asking either.

He goes on stitching. Nora makes the tea.

MICHAEL, *after looking at the tramp rather scornfully for a moment.*

That's a poor coat you have, God help you, and I'm thinking it's a poor tailor you are with it.

TRAMP.

If it's a poor tailor I am, I'm thinking it's a poor herd does be running backward and forward after a little handful of ewes, the way I seen yourself running this day, young fellow, and you coming from the fair.

Nora comes back to the table.

NORA, *to Michael, in a low voice.*

Let you not mind him at all, Michael Dara ; he has a drop taken, and it's soon he'll be falling asleep.

MICHAEL.

It's no lie he's telling ; I was destroyed, surely. They were that wilful they were running off into one man's bit of oats, and another man's bit of hay, and tumbling into the red bog till it's more like a pack of old goats than sheep they were. . . . Mountain ewes is a queer breed, Nora Burke, and I not used to them at all.

NORA, *settling the tea-things.*

There's no one can drive a mountain ewe but the men do be reared in the Glenmalure, I've heard them say, and above by Rathvanna, and the Glen Imaal—men the like of Patch Darcy, God spare his soul, who would walk through five hundred sheep and miss one of them, and he not reckoning them at all.

MICHAEL, *uneasily.*

Is it the man went queer in his head the year that's gone ?

NORA.

It is, surely.

TRAMP, *plaintively.*

That was a great man, young fellow—a great man, I'm telling you. There was never a lamb from his own ewes he wouldn't know before it was marked, and he'd run from this to the city of Dublin and never catch for his breath.

NORA, *turning round quickly.*

He was a great man surely, stranger ; and isn't it a grand thing when you hear a living man saying a good word of a dead man, and he mad dying ?

TRAMP.

It's the truth I'm saying, God spare his soul.

He puts the needle under the collar of his coat, and settles himself to sleep in the chimney corner. Nora sits down at the table : Nora and Michael's backs are turned to the bed.

MICHAEL, *looking at her with a queer look.*

I heard tell this day, Nora Burke, that it was on the path below Patch Darcy would be passing up and passing down, and I heard them say he'd never pass it night or morning without speaking with yourself.

NORA, *in a low voice.*

It was no lie you heard, Michael Dara.

MICHAEL.

I'm thinking it's a power of men you're after knowing if it's in a lonesome place you live itself.

NORA, *giving him his tea.*

It's in a lonesome place you do have to be talking with some one, and looking for some one, in the evening of the day, and if it's a power of men I'm after knowing they were fine men, for I was a hard child to please, and a hard girl to please (*she looks at him a little sternly*), and it's a hard woman I am to please this day, Michael Dara, and it's no lie I'm telling you.

MICHAEL, *looking over to see that the tramp is asleep, and then pointing to the dead man.*

Was it a hard woman to please you were when you took himself for your man?

NORA.

What way would I live, and I an old woman, if I didn't marry a man with a bit of a farm, and cows on it, and sheep on the back hills?

MICHAEL, *considering.*

That's true, Nora, and maybe it's no fool you were, for there's good grazing on it, if it is a

lonesome place, and I'm thinking it's a good sum he's left behind.

NORA, *taking the stocking with the money from her pocket, and putting it on the table.*

I do be thinking in the long nights it was a big fool I was that time, Michael Dara; for what good is a bit of a farm with cows on it, and sheep on the back hills, when you do be sitting looking out from a door, and seeing nothing but the mists rolling down the bog, and the mists again and they rolling up the bog, and hear nothing but the wind crying out in the bits of broken trees were left from the great storm, and the streams roaring with the rain.

MICHAEL, *looking at her uneasily.*

What is it ails you this night, Nora Burke? I've heard tell it's the like of that talk you do hear from men, and they after being a great while on the back hills.

NORA, *putting the money on the table.*

It's a bad night, and a wild night, Michael Dara, and isn't it a great while I am at the foot of the back hills, sitting up here boiling food for himself, and food for the brood sow, and baking a cake when the night falls? (*She puts up the*

money listlessly in little piles on the table.) Isn't it a long while I am sitting here in the winter and the summer, and the fine spring, with the young growing behind me and the old passing, saying to myself one time to look on Mary Brien, who wasn't that height (*holding out her hand*), and I a fine girl growing up, and there she is now with two children, and another coming on her in three months or four. (*She pauses.*)

MICHAEL, *moving over three of the piles.*

That's three pounds we have now, Nora Burke.

NORA, *continuing in the same voice.*

And saying to myself another time, to look on Peggy Cavanagh, who had the lightest hand at milking a cow that wouldn't be easy, or turning a cake, and there she is now walking round on the roads, or sitting in a dirty old house, with no teeth in her mouth, and no sense, and no more hair than you'd see on a bit of hill and they after burning the furze from it.

MICHAEL.

That's five pounds and ten notes, a good sum, surely! . . . It's not that way you'll be talking when you marry a young man, Nora Burke, and they were saying in the fair my

lambs were the best lambs, and I got a grand price, for I'm no fool now at making a bargain when my lambs are good.

NORA.

What was it you got?

MICHAEL.

Twenty pounds for the lot, Nora Burke. . . . We'd do right to wait now till himself will be quiet awhile in the Seven Churches, and then you'll marry me in the chapel of Rathvanna, and I'll bring the sheep up on the bit of a hill you have on the back mountain, and we won't have anything we'd be afeard to let our minds on when the mist is down.

NORA, *pouring him out some whisky.*

Why would I marry you, Mike Dara? You'll be getting old and I'll be getting old, and in a little while, I'm telling you, you'll be sitting up in your bed—the way himself was sitting—with a shake in your face, and your teeth falling, and the white hair sticking out round you like an old bush where sheep do be leaping a gap. (*Dan Burke sits up noiselessly from under the sheet, with his hand to his face. His white hair is sticking out round his head. Nora goes on slowly without hearing him.*) It's a pitiful thing to

be getting old, but it's a queer thing surely. It's a queer thing to see an old man sitting up there in his bed with no teeth in him, and a rough word in his mouth, and his chin the way it would take the bark from the edge of an oak board you'd have building a door. . . . God forgive me, Michael Dara, we'll all be getting old, but it's a queer thing surely.

MICHAEL.

It's too lonesome you are from living a long time with an old man, Nora, and you're talking again like a herd that would be coming down from the thick mist (*he puts his arm round her*), but it's a fine life you'll have now with a young man—a fine life surely. . . .

Dan sneezes violently. Michael tries to get to the door, but before he can do so Dan jumps out of the bed in queer white clothes, with the stick in his hand, and goes over and puts his back against it.

MICHAEL.

Son of God deliver us!

Crosses himself, and goes backward across the room.

DAN, *holding up his hand at him.*

Now you'll not marry her the time I'm rotting

below in the Seven Churches, and you'll see the thing I'll give you will follow you on the back mountains when the wind is high.

MICHAEL, *to Nora.*

Get me out of it, Nora, for the love of God. He always did what you bid him, and I'm thinking he would do it now.

NORA, *looking at the tramp.*

Is it dead he is or living?

DAN, *turning towards her.*

It's little you care if it's dead or living I am; but there'll be an end now of your fine times, and all the talk you have of young men and old men, and of the mist coming up or going down. (*He opens the door.*) You'll walk out now from that door, Nora Burke; and it's not to-morrow, or the next day, or any day of your life, that you'll put in your foot through it again.

TRAMP, *standing up.*

It's a hard thing you're saying for an old man, master of the house; and what would the like of her do if you put her out on the roads?

DAN.

Let her walk round the like of Peggy Cavanagh

below, and be begging money at the cross-roads, or selling songs to the men. (*To Nora.*) Walk out now, Nora Burke, and it's soon you'll be getting old with that life, I'm telling you; it's soon your teeth'll be falling and your head'll be the like of a bush where sheep do be leaping a gap. (*He pauses; Nora looks round at Michael.*)

MICHAEL, *timidly.*

There's a fine Union below in Rathdrum.

DAN.

The like of her would never go there. . . . It's lonesome roads she'll be going and hiding herself away till the end will come, and they find her stretched like a dead sheep with the frost on her, or the big spiders maybe, and they putting their webs on her, in the butt of a ditch.

NORA, *angrily.*

What way will yourself be that day, Daniel Burke? What way will you be that day and you lying down a long while in your grave? For it's bad you are living, and it's bad you'll be when you're dead. (*She looks at him a moment fiercely, then half turns away and speaks plaintively again.*) Yet, if it is itself, Daniel Burke, who can help it at all, and let you be getting up

into your bed, and not be taking your death with the wind blowing on you, and the rain with it, and you half in your skin.

DAN.

It's proud and happy you'd be if I was getting my death the day I was shut of yourself. (*Pointing to the door.*) Let you walk out through that door, I'm telling you, and let you not be passing this way if it's hungry you are, or wanting a bed.

TRAMP, *pointing to Michael.*

Maybe himself would take her.

NORA.

What would he do with me now?

TRAMP.

Give you the half of a dry bed, and good food in your mouth.

DAN.

Is it a fool you think him, stranger, or is it a fool you were born yourself? Let her walk out of that door, and let you go along with her, stranger—if it's raining itself—for it's too much talk you have surely.

TRAMP, *going over to Nora.*

We'll be going now, lady of the house; the rain is falling, but the air is kind, and maybe it'll be a grand morning, by the grace of God.

NORA.

What good is a grand morning when I'm destroyed surely, and I going out to get my death walking the roads?

TRAMP.

You'll not be getting your death with myself, lady of the house, and I knowing all the ways a man can put food in his mouth. . . . We'll be going now, I'm telling you, and the time you'll be feeling the cold, and the frost, and the great rain, and the sun again, and the south wind blowing in the glens, you'll not be sitting up on a wet ditch, the way you're after sitting in this place, making yourself old with looking on each day, and it passing you by. You'll be saying one time, "It's a grand evening, by the grace of God," and another time, "It's a wild night, God help us; but it'll pass, surely." You'll he saying . . .

DAN, *goes over to them, crying out impatiently.*

Go out of that door, I'm telling you, and do your blathering below in the glen.

Nora gathers a few things into her shawl.

TRAMP, *at the door.*

Come along with me now, lady of the house, and it's not my blather you'll be hearing only, but you'll be hearing the herons crying out over the black lakes, and you'll be hearing the grouse and the owls with them, and the larks and the big thrushes when the days are warm ; and it's not from the like of them you'll be hearing a tale of getting old like Peggy Cavanagh, and losing the hair off you, and the light of your eyes, but it's fine songs you'll be hearing when the sun goes up, and there'll be no old fellow wheezing, the like of a sick sheep, close to your ear.

NORA.

I'm thinking it's myself will be wheezing that time with lying down under the heavens when the night is cold ; but you've a fine bit of talk, stranger, and it's with yourself I'll go. (*She goes towards the door, then turns to Dan.*) You think it's a grand thing you're after doing with your

letting on to be dead, but what is it at all? What way would a woman live in a lonesome place the like of this place, and she not making a talk with the men passing? And what way will yourself live from this day, with none to care for you? What is it you'll have now but a black life, Daniel Burke; and it's not long, I'm telling you, till you'll be lying again under that sheet, and you dead surely.

She goes out with the tramp. Michael is slinking after them, but Dan stops him.

DAN.

Sit down now and take a little taste of the stuff, Michael Dara. There's a great drouth on me, and the night is young.

MICHAEL, *coming back to the table.*

And it's very dry I am, surely, with the fear of death you put on me, and I after driving mountain ewes since the turn of the day.

DAN, *throwing away his stick.*

I was thinking to strike you, Michael Dara; but you're a quiet man, God help you, and I don't mind you at all. (*He pours out two glasses of*

whisky, and gives one to Michael.) Your good health, Michael Dara.

MICHAEL.

God reward you, Daniel Burke, and may you have a long life and a quiet life, and good health with it. (*They drink.*)

CURTAIN.

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